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9 August 1984

MEMORANDUM FOR: Director of Central Intelligence
Deputy Director of Central Intelligence

FROM: David D. Gries
National Intelligence Officer for East Asia

SUBJECT: Cam Ranh Bay Talking Points

Further to our discussion this morning, here are talking points and backup text on Cam Ranh Bay for use with Admiral Poindexter. They are drawn from our NIE 11/40, "Soviet Policy in East Asia," currently undergoing coordination.

Talking Points

Situation:

Soviet forces at Cam Ranh Bay have grown since 1979 and are virtually certain to increase.

- Since 1982 use by Soviet ships and submarines has doubled; by 1984 Soviet naval contingent was largest routinely deployed at any non-Soviet base.
- Naval aviation (4 Bear D/F reconnaissance and ASW aircraft and 9 TU-16 strike, reconnaissance, and tanker aircraft) could be initial part of full regiment (up to 36 aircraft). This is first deployment of manned strike aircraft outside contiguous bloc states since 1971.

Implications:

- Soviet deployments, while vulnerable in wartime, increases threat to U.S. and allies.
- Middle East Oil and raw material lifeline could be harrassed by Soviet naval and air forces.
- Naval mines in Malacca, Sunda and Lombok Straits could complicate transition of U.S. forces in responding to crisis in Indian Ocean or Middle East.

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- Creates perception of increased Soviet influence in the region and puts pressure on U.S. allies such as the Philippines.
- Installation of other weapons such as more tactical air forces or cruise missiles would present a greater threat to U.S. forces.
- In the event of a war in Europe, Soviet attacks on shipping in Indian Ocean would require a divergence of U.S. forces from European theatre.

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David D. Gries

Att: Backup Text

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9 August 1984

MEMORANDUM FOR: Director of Central Intelligence
Deputy Director of Central Intelligence

FROM: David D. Gries
National Intelligence Officer for East Asia

SUBJECT: Cam Ranh Bay Talking Points

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25X1Cam Ranh Bay

Moscow took advantage of the Sino-Vietnamese conflict and Vietnam's desperate need for economic and military aid in 1979 to gain access to Cam Ranh Bay, today a de facto Soviet base located in the best harbor in the South China Sea. There the Soviets enjoy access to a self-secured area remote from the indigenous population--an ideal situation from Moscow's point of view. Over the past four years, this base has been renovated, significant improvements have been made, and Vietnamese-operated air defenses have been installed. The base complex now includes some limited naval repair facilities, a floating drydock, an all-weather airfield suitable for use by all types of Soviet aircraft, an intelligence collection site, and satellite communications facilities for rapid communications with Moscow.

The capabilities of Soviet forces at Cam Ranh Bay have grown since Soviet ships were first seen there in 1979 and are virtually certain to increase.

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Since mid-1982, use by Soviet ships and submarines has doubled and the size of the logistics support force has more than tripled. The typical Soviet naval contingent there now includes four submarines, a frigate, a minesweeper and some auxiliaries and will be augmented periodically by larger and more capable ships, including calls by Kiev-class aircraft carriers. By early 1984, the Soviet naval contingent was the largest concentration of Soviet auxiliaries and combatants routinely deployed at any non-Soviet base.

A naval aviation detachment of four Bear D/F reconnaissance and ASW aircraft and nine TU-16 Badger strike, reconnaissance and tanker aircraft is presently stationed at Cam Ranh Bay (the Badgers since November 1983). The Badger deployment could be the initial part of a full regiment (up to 36 aircraft), and improvements to Cam Ranh Bay since mid-1982 make it appear capable of supporting the larger force. The Badger deployment late last year marked the first time the USSR has deployed manned strike aircraft outside the contiguous bloc states since 1971. The Badgers, however, remain vulnerable under wartime conditions, and we do not have evidence that the Soviets have yet begun to harden the Cam Ranh Bay facilities. Within the time frame of this estimate, Cam Ranh Bay might

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also be developed as a base for Soviet tactical air support deployments or for other Soviet naval operations in the vicinity, though we consider this unlikely. It could also serve as a base for Backfire bombers currently stationed only within the USSR.

Soviet forces in Vietnam are located close to major Western shipping routes for Middle Eastern oil and for raw materials sources for the US and its Asian allies. This lifeline could be harassed by the relatively modest naval and air forces that Moscow regularly employs in the area, although these forces would be highly vulnerable in wartime. Naval mines could be particularly troublesome in the Malacca, Sunda, and Lombok Straits. US forces in the Pacific must transit these sea routes to respond to crises in the Indian Ocean or Middle East. Moscow meanwhile may be trying to create the impression that Soviet military power in Southeast Asia is growing at a time when US forces, for example, in the Philippines, are somewhat vulnerable to local political uncertainty.

Even a small Soviet presence in Vietnam presents problems for US power projection. The Soviet Pacific Fleet can be operated more safely with support from Cam Ranh Bay during transits of the South China Sea. Installation of long range surface-to-air

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missiles or cruise missiles in Vietnam would present an increased threat to our forces throughout the region. In the event of a war with NATO, Soviet aircraft in Vietnam could be used to attack shipping in the Indian Ocean. Shipping normally routed through this area would be vulnerable unless escorted, and carrier air support for NATO shipping would be required at the same time it was needed elsewhere (see figure 6).

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